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that application, that exertion required to ensure success in the attainment of knowledge.

To be contemporary, with Newton, Locke, Haller, Linnæus, Black, Lavoisier, or Laplace; to converse with them, to have such men daily before our eyes, to hear the praises bestowed on them, to see the high station which they occupy, and behold the honours conferred on them by the wisest and greatest men of every nation, may rouse the fire of enthusiasm, create a desire to pursue their course, and to emulate their fame. Few, however, can enjoy this enviable situation, and to supply the deficiency, the biographer records their actions in the annals of the world, and thus presents an example to future ages.

Learn to admire the virtuous and the great: true admiration naturally excites a desire to imitate and I am happy that the investigation of character forms so prominent a portion of the labours of the Historic Society; you will learn by this "that your confidence is a jewel not to be staked on the cast of a die, it must be deserved, not won," and remember that intricate are the paths which lead to truth, how thankful must we therefore be, to those who guide our wandering steps, tell us how others erred, and how they were successful.

The brazen statue and the marble column fall into dust, but the pen of the historian confers an eternity on the actions of men, and transmits them to the most distant period of time. The writings of Moses remain, and the heroes of Plutarch pass before our eyes, although the pompous cities which the one describes, and the statues which were erected to the heroes of the other, have long since united with the earth from which they sprung.

But the truths which even this society may establish, may remain a monument of its existence long after we have descended into the peaceful grave, and those walls which surround us, crumbled into dust, have been dispersed by the winds of heaven.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY ROBERT GRIMSHAW, AS PRESIDENT OF THE BELFAST HISTORIC SOCIETY, AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, ENDING 31ST MAY, 1814.

GENTLEMEN,

IT is now about three years since a number of young men, desirous of promoting the study of history and the cultivation of oratory, formed themselves into a society which they named the Belfast Historic Society.

In framing the constitution of this establishment, it was thought advisable that each session should be opened by an address from the chair, and closed in the same manner.

One month prior to the close of the session a member is ballotted for, to fulfil this duty; when this ballot took place, the gentleman who had the most numerous votes, found it necessary to decline the office, in consequence of expected absence at that time: the task then devolved on me, and notwithstanding the pride I felt from the honor conferred on me by the society, in thus overrating my merit, I feel a painful consciousness of my inability to perform the task with satisfaction to them or credit to myself. I accepted it with feelings of regret, that the gentleman who was first appointed, could not now address you,

aware how much his talents would have effected in securing to the society that fame which it has acquired by the brilliant display of eloquence and youthful talent, exhibited by the gentleman who closed the last session, and were we to estimate from thence its future greatness, we might calculate on producing orators which may rival the most distinguished ornaments of modern times.

It is my duty to acquaint you with its fundamental principles, taking it in its several branches, and endeavour to point out the beneficial effects which have ensued, and are likely to ensue from this institution.

Its members are of two descriptions, ordinary and honorary; the qualification of the former is very simple, but at the same time, affords us good materials with which to form valuable citizens, namely, unimpeachable integrity, and general good character, accompanied with zeal for the cultivation of talent, and the acquisition of knowledge; rank nor wealth have no influence in our decisions, as we pay equal respect to the merchant or his apprentice: merit is the standard by which this little republic is guided in the election of her members. The ordinary members defray the expences attending the institution.

The honorary members are persons distinguished by their talents and literary attainments, and I may add, zealous for our interest and improvement, and are exempt from the duties and expences of the society.

In framing our constitution, it has been established as a fundamental principle to exclude the discussion of theological questions, or the politics of the day, aware that the introduction of such discussions would tend to transform our society from

a school of oratory and historical research, into a scene of wrangling and disputation, and disturb that mutual harmony and good will which I trust will ever reign within these walls.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that we have no particular creed or articles of faith by which to judge whether the members of this society are likely to meet together in another world. We hold it as certain truth, that the supreme giver of all things, in constituting us free agents, allowed us the exercise of our reason, and that the bigot who would impose penalties on the conscience, and dictate to his fellow creature, the mode in which he shall worship his God, arrogates to himself an authority, equally repugnant to the mild and tolerating principles of christianity, and to that infinite wisdom and justice which are attributes of the Creator.

The society is divided into the following branches.

First, The Historic Class, into which every member must enter for the first session, and undergo an examination in the History of England, a portion of the history is allotted for each night, and an examiner appointed whose duty it is to ask such questions in rotation of the members, as are calculated to excite an interest in the study, and imprint the most important facts more deeply in the memory; the member who appears to have been returned ofttest as best answerer during the session is entitled to a silver medal.

This class is intended as a simple introduction to historical knowledge, to exercise the memory and gradually prepare the mind for more extensive information. If once we can form a taste and excite an interest in the pursuit, our improvement is secure, for we ever pursue with success, what we engage in

with pleasure. The study of history is so simple and interesting, as to be admirably calculated at once to amuse and instruct; it admits us, as it were, behind the scenes, where we view the most celebrated actors in the great political drama, stripped of those disguises which concealed their native characters, while performing their parts on the theatre of public life. The exalted sentiments and heroic actions, which history records for our instruction, are calculated to inspire us with a love of virtue, hatred of vice, contempt of fortune, and the admiration of every thing that is noble in sentiment, or truly great in action. It not only furnishes us with the finest lessons of morality, but is at the same time the most instructive school of political wisdom. It points out to the statesman, and the legislator, the likeliest means of promoting national prosperity, and of giving security to government, without infringing on the natural liberty of the subject. History brings us also to a more intimate knowledge of ourselves, and by pointing out the failings of others, affords us a guide for the regulation of our own conduct. By this friendly monitor kings are reminded that they are but men; subjects are instructed in their natural rights, and taught to oppose every encroachment on their privileges. Uninstructed by its lessons, how long might the inhabitants of Great Britain have remained in bondage, and groaned beneath the oppression of feudal tyrants. Enlightened by the records of former times, and fired by the illustrious examples of antiquity, they have gradually overturned the fabric of feudal tyranny, and by repeated and often bloody struggles with regal encroachments, established a constitution, which in its purity, is admirably calculated to preserve the rights

of the subject, and at the same time secure its own permanency.

The history of England has the strongest claims to our attention, connected as we are as subjects with those revolutions to which our constitution owes its present form; besides that its pages abound with characters and events, equally interesting with any that are recorded in the annals of mankind. Who can contemplate such characters as a Russel, a Hampden, or a Sidney, without feelings of admiration for their patriotic exertions, without an ardent wish to emulate their virtues. English History likewise conveys to monarchs the most awful lessons, it shews them that in order that their authority may be secure, it must be founded on the basis of public liberty, and guarded by the affections of their people. They have seen Charles the first, expiating on the scaffold, the violation of his sacred trust, and James the second, compelled to abdicate a throne of which he had rendered himself unworthy, by his bigotry and his oppression.

The Constitution Class is the next branch which comes under our consideration; it is composed of members who have served one session, they undergo an examination in Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, and as in the History Class, the best answerer is rewarded with a silver medal.

This is a branch of knowledge, with which every member of society should make himself acquainted; it is a duty he owes himself and to the community of which he is a member, that he may judge whether the laws are justly administered by those entrusted with their execution, and oppose every violation of them which may arise from the ignorance or partiality of magistrates. The constitution under which

we live supposes every man a legislator, and tells him it is his duty as well as his right, to point out to parliament the moment a law is abused or infringed on, either by the people or by magistrates. Should your rights be invaded hear it not in silence. Speak out, and boldly too; do as the constitution directs you, and you will be heard. In the progress of the Catholic cause, we have seen what may be effected by repeated and constitutional applications to the representatives of the people. Let us look back to their cause in the days of Lord George Gordon, when it was dangerous even to mention the subject in the House of Commons, and look now at the change of sentiment, when they are within a few votes of having their rights restored them. Had they desponded and borne their grievances in silence, they would not have deserved their freedom. By frequently bringing their cause before the public, they have dispelled those clouds of bigotry and superstition, which have for ages enveloped human reason in darkness, and obscured every principle of justice.

The next branch which comes under our consideration, and that which forms the leading object of our society is Oratory, an object, which in a free state, yields not in importance to any other. The eloquence of the Orator, has often effected more for the freedom of states, than the valour of the warrior. The ancients justly held this talent in the highest estimation, regarding their orators as the guardians of the public safety, and the bulwarks of their liberty. It was the path that all pursued who wished to arrive at eminence, or gain the applauses of their country. In the town in which we live, we have sufficient inducements to cultivate the talent

of public speaking, by the opportunities afforded us in public meetings, of discussing measures of national utility, and of conveying the wishes of the people to their representatives in Parliament. In private company, how often have we seen men of inferior talents and weak heads, but who had been accustomed to express themselves, silence those much their superiors in talents and information, but who had not acquired the same facility of arranging and expressing their ideas. How often do we meet with men possessed of genius, and furnished with the most extensive information, silenced in argument by the most ignorant and illiterate; unaccustomed to communicate their acquisitions, their knowledge becomes a heap of literary lumber, equally useless to themselves and to society.

If then, the talent of expressing our ideas, be so useful and agreeable in private company, how much more valuable must it be in public where we have so often an occasion to deliver our opinions. Our own town affords us many opportunities of observing the ascendancy which it gives at committees, and town meetings. In the former one or two persons usually engross the entire management of the business, and carry every point. I have often heard people out of committees of this kind, condemn the very measure which but a moment before they had allowed to pass in silence, merely because they were unaccustomed to speak in public. In town meetings we have seen the inhabitants of this respectable town, browbeaten and insulted, their opinions treated with contempt, and even told, they had no right to express them. To the shame of our town must it be recorded, no voice was raised to thunder in their ears, their insolence and oppression. That pub-

lic spirit which once glowed in the breasts of its inhabitants seems now to be extinct, and every noble sentiment, every patriotic feeling absorbed in the pursuit of sordid wealth. Truth is called violence, and opposition to an intolerant faction termed disloyalty. For we never can erase from our memory the feeble support experienced by one of our most valuable citizens in his struggles against oppression and tyranny. May we hope that this society may one day produce men who will not tamely submit to be insulted by little tyrants, but by bold and manly eloquence defend the rights of their fellow citizens.

Let us not flatter ourselves however, that by mere attention to the discipline of this society, we are to arrive at eminence as public speakers. We are so constituted by nature, that the most valuable gifts are ever placed the farthest from our grasp, and that of eloquence is placed at such a height, that in order to attain it we must exert the utmost energy, the most unremitting exertion of which we are capable. Let us hold in our view the example of Demosthenes, who struggling against impediments, which to a common mind would have appeared insurmountable, became the most perfect model of bold and energetic eloquence that the world has ever produced.

The society, desirous of giving every mental talent an opportunity of developing itself, have this session, by a new regulation, endeavoured to promote the composition of essays in prose and verse, to be read before the society, and certificates are to be adjudged to those whose compositions are considered to have the greatest merit. In this country, where the liberty of the press is considered the grand bulwark of the people's rights, the talent for

composition yields not in importance, to that of public speaking. Oratory can only be brought occasionally into action, but those who are capable of writing with force and argument, have always an opportunity of serving the public, through the medium of a free press. I blush for human nature, when I say, the freedom of the press has often been more effectual in obliging ministers to be just, than all the ties of religion, justice, or love of country. In a moral as well as a political point of view, this talent is highly to be valued; it enables its possessor to benefit society, by ridiculing the follies, and exposing the vices, which fall under his daily observation.

The practice of composition in verse has been recommended by Dr. Franklin and other writers, even to those who have little or no poetical genius, as a means of giving a command of language, and greater smoothness to compositions in prose.

I have thus endeavoured, gentlemen, as far as in my power to detail to you the principles of our society, and to give to you a faint idea of its advantages if properly supported.

It is now my duty to address myself to the members of the society, and in doing so I must divest myself of every feeling of partiality, and whilst I feel so much pride, and so much satisfaction on beholding the important benefits which this institution affords, it is with painful sensations I am compelled to notice that many of you have but feebly fulfilled those duties which on your entrance here you pledged yourselves to perform. Some of our old members, and with a few exceptions, the entire of our new, seem to have forgotten the solemn engagement which they entered into before they were recognized as members of this society: where you promised in

presence of your own conscience, and before your brother members, to conform to our laws and fulfil the duties required of you.

For shame, gentlemen, to enrol yourselves under the banners of literature, and at your very onset to desert its interests.

The History and Constitution Classes which appeared to the first members of this society of so much consequence, seem entirely neglected, and those honours which they offer, and which once created such a spirit of emulation, are entirely disregarded by you.

Some of our members from their very bad attendance, and those to whom I most particularly allude I am sorry to observe are not present, have scarcely ever felt the pleasure it gives the philanthropic mind on entering, and the delightful sensations carried from the society where you have associated together, not for the purpose of destroying every generous and noble feeling, by surfeiting yourselves in sensual gratifications, not to break down your constitution and squander your property over the bottle, and worse than waste the short space of time which is afforded you for the improvement of your minds.

Contrast this mode of life with the elevated purpose for which we are associated; who could hesitate a moment in his choice. The one destroys the only faculty which raises us above the brute; the other directs that faculty to its proper objects, and renders us worthy of that exalted station which the Creator has assigned us in the scale of animated beings.

Want of time has been brought forward on all occasions as an excuse, but in my mind, such an apology is merely a pretext for want of industry, as so much business never falls to the lot of any man,

that he might not attend to it, if he arranges his time judiciously; on this every thing depends, the day is long, and after deducting time for sleep, leaves sufficient for business, for study, and for amusement, if the economy of time be properly attended to.

Liverpool affords us an illustrious example of the effects of industry and proper arrangement of time, in the person of her great Roscoe. Once in a very subordinate situation, without friends, for one, or education, such has been the effect of his industry, that he has raised himself to be one of the most eminent merchants and bankers, the greatest scholar and philanthropist, and the most distinguished patriot of his age.

If what I have now said, have the effect of leading a single individual to an earnest and steady endeavour after the attainment of knowledge, and the improvement of his talents, I shall feel myself consoled for having thus feebly acquitted myself of a task which I accepted, not from a consciousness of ability, but from that fond solicitude, and affectionate regard with which I have watched over the early infancy, and to my latest hour shall continue to view the rising growth, and I trust the future maturity, of the Historic Society.

I shall now conclude with a fervent prayer, that this society may one day realize our fondest hopes and expectations; that the seeds of knowledge and virtue which shall here be sown, may produce an abundant harvest of future usefulness and honour; and that its members, by unwearied diligence in the cultivation of those powers with which Providence has blessed them, may become a source of happiness to themselves, usefulness to society, and honour to their Native Country.